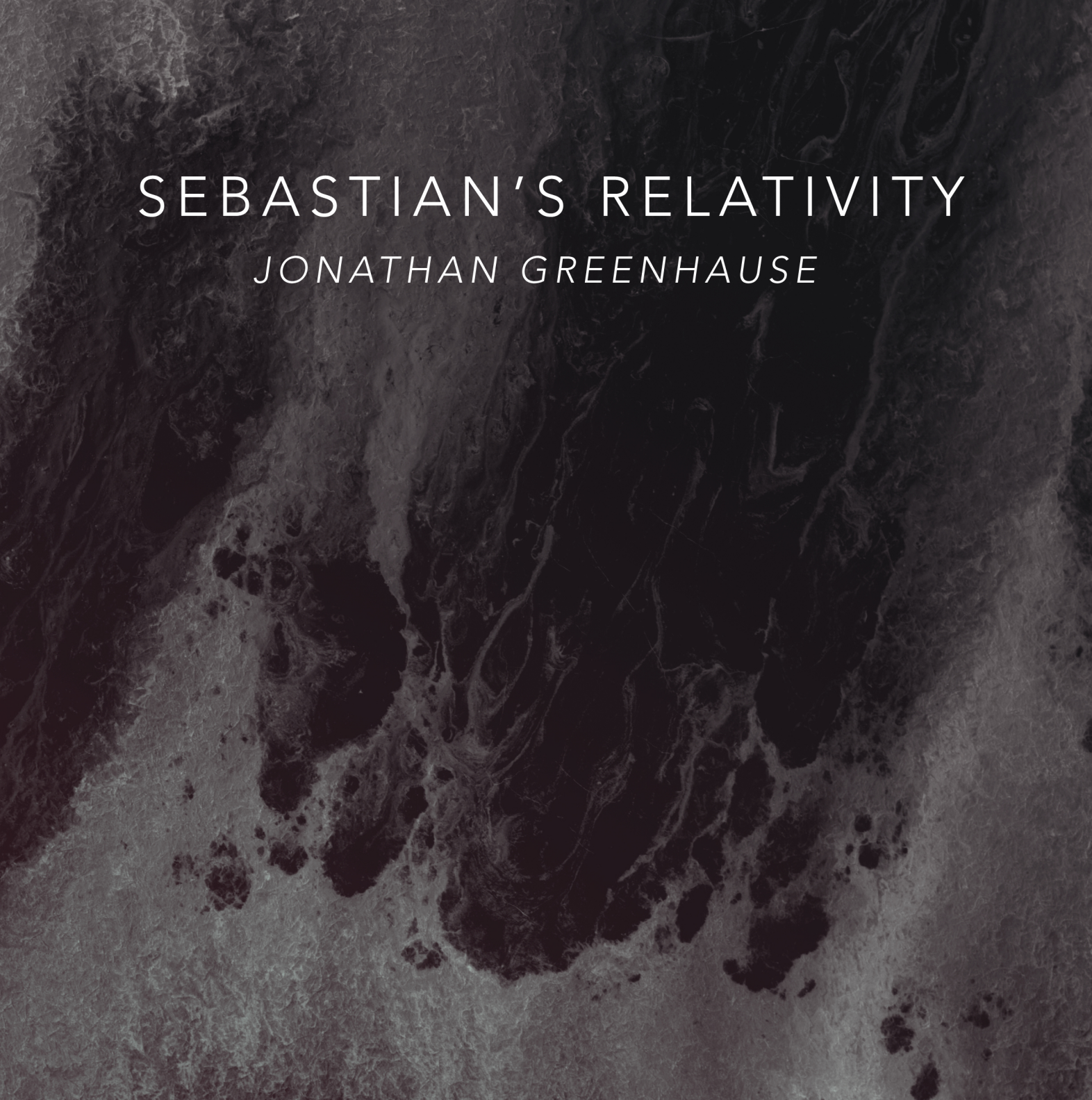


The background of the entire image is a dark, monochromatic marbled paper. It features intricate, swirling patterns of deep charcoal, black, and muted grey, creating a complex, organic texture. The lighting is slightly uneven, with some areas appearing darker than others, adding to the depth of the pattern.

SEBASTIAN'S RELATIVITY

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE





Copyright ©2011 by **ANOBIUM**
All rights reserved

First Printing

Design: **JACOB VAN LOON**
Typeface: Calson 540 LT STD, Avenir LT STD
Composition: Anobium; Chicago, IL
Printing: Bookmobile; Minneapolis, MN

ANOBIUMLIT.COM

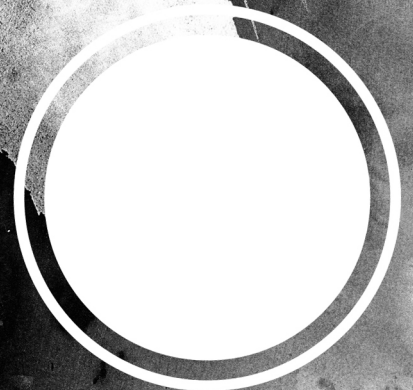
The poems “*Sebastian & the Series of Three Words*”, “*The Power of Suggestion*” and “*Fido & the War in Iraq*” previously appeared in *Going Down Swinging*. The poem “*Being True to Himself*” previously appeared in *Ilya’s Honey*.

SEBASTIAN'S RELATIVITY

By Jonathan Greenhouse

ANOBIUM

Chicago



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, without whom I would still be extremely lonely.

This book is also dedicated to my parents and sister, without whom I wouldn't be the person I am today, whether that's a good thing or not.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Out of Water
3	Sebastian & the Series of Three Words
5	The Power of Suggestion
6	Fido & the War in Iraq
7	How Sebastian Met His Fathers
8	Sebastian's Siamese Sisters & the Smallest Square-Dance Ever
10	A Late-Night Escape
11	Samantha & the Butterflies
13	Swallowing Another Tongue
14	Being True to Himself
15	An Encounter With Ko Un
16	Sebastian's Burrito & the Concept of Infinity
17	Into the Black Hole
18	Carole/Anne's Cries for Independence
19	An Apparent Lack of Color
20	Loss Aversion
21	Sebastian's Shoes
22	The Racing of the Pigs
25	The Continuity of Time
26	Funny Monkey
27	Date With Death
28	Exit from Internment
29	Getting Engaged to Himself
30	The Journey Back
31	Sebastian Meets Santa Claus
32	Celebrating December 26th
33	Research on Cabbage

OUT *of* WATER

Sebastian's born undersea,
mermaids lauding him with their deftly-concocted choruses,
 fish exhorting him to sample their delectable flesh,
& seaweed forests shedding their swampy leaves to provide him nutrients.
He delves into the coral's crevices & crags,
 into whales' skeletal remains,
& reconstructs the memory of his years with their accumulated bones,
 the water's welcome embrace a constant,
like the blood feeding his circulation of aqueous thoughts,

but the water draws in around him,
the surrounding sea seen as refuge disintegrating into the famished air,
 hydrogen dispersing
into the atmosphere's voracious appetite,
his underwater reality inverted as the sun extinguishes its darkness,
 & soon Sebastian lies unconscious in a swirl of sand,
his soaked skin seized by a tangle of polyps & seaweed.
He hardly breathes, this end beginning with a blanket of sunshine
 erasing the traces of his maritime world.
Flopping fish are devoured by vultures vying for the glitter of their scales,
 & mermaids gather in convoluted mumblings,
all their dreams of tomorrow becoming an erasure of days.

Abandoned in the sun-drenched landscape,
Sebastian does what he can to survive in its foreign maze,
 adapting to its ways,
shedding his oceanic appendages,
& learning to live amidst the comings & goings of terrestrial beings,
& in time, his life approaches a respectable degree of normalcy,
 something he isn't sure he wants.



SEBASTIAN & *the* SERIES *of* THREE WORDS

Sebastian writes a series of poems composed of solely three words
with the idea of becoming famous
as the poet who only writes poems composed of solely three words.
His first poem in the series is called “#1” & reads:

Psychologist furniture painting.

He’s not sure what to do with “#1” at first,
so he places it in a drawer
until enough time’s passed for him to be able to take it out of the drawer:
This lasts approximately 45 minutes,
after which he takes another look at the poem
& flirts with the idea of switching the order of the first two words.
He even thinks about changing the title to “#2”,
but he feels like this would be cheating the reader, & everything’s kept as is.

He’s amazed with the visual connection
between *Psychologist* & *furniture*
& starts thinking about future generations of schoolchildren
& how they’ll read his quick successions of three words
& how their teachers will point out
the word “painting” can be read as a noun, a verb, or a gerund,
& how a gerund’s *both* a noun *and* a verb,
& he ponders the consequences this will have on the literary mind.
He stares at the three words & asks himself:
Should I formalize the style?
Will I always have to include an ambiguous gerund following two nouns?

& now staring at the word painting, Sebastian suddenly feels paralyzed:
What if he’s just written the most perfect poem in the English language?
How would he be able to match this accomplishment?
Future critics would signal “#1” as the high-point of his career,
followed by vain attempts to relive the glory of his pre-commercial success,
such as *Psychologist furniture* reading.

Sebastian crumples up the paper upon which “#1” is written
 & tosses it into the wastebasket.
The slowly-uncrinkling sheet settles into its new home
among a rotten banana peel & several mangled & unusable paperclips,
 but the poem’s still in his head,
that same immovable order,
those same three words brought back into being as if by incantation.

The poem’s now larger than himself.
It must reach the ears of all the curious minds of this world,
& so Sebastian types the remembered poem in big bold letters
 & prints out a hundred copies,
then he quickly gets dressed
& walks out into a world waiting to hear his essential, inevitable voice.

He’ll start by handing out the poem to anyone who passes by,
 & word will spread,
news of this new & potent form of the written word
sending chills through the hearts of the old literary establishment,
 the power of “#1” impossible to ignore,
its elaborate cadences to be pronounced in a thousand nations’ tongues,

but Sebastian looks around him & sees no one,
 the streets completely deserted,
as a nightingale’s song spirals down from an oak’s embracing leaves:
Sebastian looks at his watch & sees it’s three o’clock in the morning,
 & he’s on the cusp of greatness.

THE POWER *of* SUGGESTION

Sebastian decides to buy a life-size German Shepherd statue,
though he's not sure why.
It's conveniently placed right by the cash register at his local pet store,
& when the sales clerk innocently asks *Would you like anything else today?*,
he can't help but fix his gaze on Fido.
That's what his apartment's been lacking:
The secure presence & warmth of man's best friend,
even in its cold & pre-fabricated industrial-plastic incarnation.

He picks up the surprisingly-light figure, lifts it upon the countertop,
pushes it gently towards the register,
& asks *How much for the dog?*,
as the cashier stares back & forth between Sebastian & Fido.
Is this some kind of a joke? she asks,
her eyes glued squarely on Fido's strangely-smiling face.

Sebastian shakes his head & tries to look as serious as he can.
I'm lonely, he explains,
pulling out an album from his back-pocket
full of pictures of himself & an empty space besides him.
You know this is a liquor store, the cashier answers,
lifting her arms up & pointing to the endless shelves of booze behind her.
Sebastian shakes his head vehemently & stammers *No...this is a pet store!*,
but he looks around & sees liquor everywhere.

The cashier shoves Fido towards Sebastian & asks
Are you going to pay for that or not?
& Sebastian grabs the dog in his hands,
racing out the store as the cashier screams at him from the register,
& when the manager comes by to ask what's just happened,
the cashier shakes her head
& says *He thought this was a liquor store*,
& she & the manager laugh while reorganizing the towering stacks of Alpo.

FIDO & *the* WAR *in* IRAQ

Sebastian places Fido, his industrial-plastic life-size German Shepherd,
by the window facing the street,
while in the apartment directly across from them,
there's a life-size reproduction of a Siamese-cat,
 & they both stare at each other,
as if in some other-worldly metaphysical duel.

Fido doesn't eat at all,
but he's got dog-food waiting for him in a metal bowl by the kitchen sink,
 Sebastian imagining
how something magical could happen,
how Fido could be converted into flesh & blood,
but then the cat across the street would be staring at nothing,
 all good things
capable of bringing about dire consequences.

Sebastian's been thinking about Iraq a lot recently.
 He normally doesn't delve into politics,
but he feels it's too important to keep his opinions to himself,
 & so he's written one of his 3-word poems to express his anguish
 regarding the recent American occupation:
It's entitled "#90", & it reads: *Steel steal still*.
He hasn't made up his mind yet about the definitive word order,
but he knows he'll read it at the cash register of his local pet/liquor store.

Sebastian keeps Fido on a leash,
fearing how an envious passerby might lure his stationary pet outside,
 & an orphan stands beneath their window,
tossing up stones to scare Fido, but he doesn't move at all,
 & Sebastian imagines how the cat across the street
 must be grateful for that.

HOW SEBASTIAN MET HIS FATHERS

His ten fathers come to the doorstep,
calling out his name with the same gruff voice:

Sebastian, let us in!

‣ he hesitates, leaning his weight back on his naked left heel,
then unlatches the lock
‣ lets in his rollicking torrent of unleashed paternity.

Sebastian! each one tenderly shouts as they embrace him
‣ hand him wrapped gifts containing wondrous ‣ horrible scents:
The 1st father gives him a baked ham cured in licorice ‣ mint leaves.
The 2nd gives him a squid's severed tentacle.
The 3rd ‣ 4th give two halves of a giraffe fetus soaked in formaldehyde,
while his 5th father apologizes for giving nothing
but then regurgitates his breakfast into Sebastian's hands.

His 6th father holds a bar of napalm-scented soap,
as the 7th has a newborn child ‣ whispers He's your brother.
The 8th's a drunkard sharing the dregs of his last drink,
‣ the 9th sneaks past Sebastian with footprints filled with excrement.
The last father, completely naked, stands in front of Sebastian ‣ says:
Your mother was a slut, but an awfully good one.

Sebastian asks his fathers to sit down on the linoleum floor,
‣ their bones splinter ‣ crack while accommodating themselves.
A few of them scream in agony.
The 4th father, who had brought one-half of the giraffe's fetus,
asks to go to the bathroom, then escapes through the unlocked front door.
The drunkard asks for a bottle of beer,
‣ Sebastian responds *It's in the kitchen* ‣ watches him struggle to his feet,
cursing his brittle bones as he walks through the door left open by father #4.

Successive fathers raise their hands:
I need a winter jacket... Rosebud... The State Capital of South Dakota...
‣ after all his fathers have gotten up ‣ slammed the door behind them,
the only sounds in Sebastian's ears
are his own thunderous heartbeats
‣ the shrill cries of his baby brother, wrapped in a leopard-skin diaper
‣ crawling atop the pile of gifts his fathers have left him.

SEBASTIAN'S SIAMESE SISTERS & THE SMALLEST SQUARE-DANCE EVER

The moon grows fat with waxing, & Sebastian sleeps beneath his bed,
 small creatures sharing this space with him,
while from the intercom,
he hears his Siamese sisters' shrill voices shout in unison,
 Carole/Anne's conjoined lips
ululating his name,
stretching out the slithering s's until they deflate like a balloon loosely tied.

A pair of mice scurries over his bare feet,
 leaving trails of grease
from the remnants of leftover pancakes,
neither mouse stopping to inquire about this man
whose nose is pressed against the hardwood's dull surface.

A blackbird crashes against the bedroom window,
 & staring eastward
Sebastian sees a river half-frozen while the other half burns.
He yawns, his eyes centered on a square-dance
 synchronically-coordinated
by a quartet of quarter-sized cockroaches.

None of the roaches sing, but Sebastian provides the background,
 the music of his tapping fingers,
as his feet carefully beat against the floor,
& a measured song seeps in from the sidewalk outside,
 an orphan
holding a fistful of stones & chanting *5 for a dollar!*
as his eyes focus upon the broken-winged blackbird in its death throes.

The boy feels Carole/Anne's hot breath as they sneak up behind him,
 the two of them sometimes only one
& wishing to join their single heart with a single pair of boys,
while Sebastian listens to the roaches' softly-tapping legs,
 turning into
an almost-soundless symphony.



A LATE-NIGHT ESCAPE

It's 3 o'clock in the morning
☞ Sebastian wakes up with an inexplicable need to eat greasy delicacies.
Stars blink in their mysterious orchestration,
their 3/4 rhythm synchronized to the sounds
of two toads mating beside a detergent-laden stream.

Sebastian slips on a pair of jeans ☞ sprints into the darkness.
It's 3:05, ☞ a comet's fragments have just grazed Earth's atmosphere,
depositing its detritus
from which to fabricate ten-thousand future shooting stars.
Masked raccoons remove garbage lids with a rattle of tin ☞ asphalt,
their curved claws
digging into a dish of rotten meat ☞ milk lingering long past expiration dates.

Sebastian races past cookie-cutter rows of homes
☞ stares into an endless black sky with illuminated crumbs of stars
as the new moon vacations in our terrestrial shadow,
☞ as he nears the floodlit promise of an open-all-night "Pancake Palace",
Sebastian's voracious hunger multiplies, while inside the deep-fried eatery,
a lovelorn janitor's dancing with a broomstick
☞ listening to the irregular sound of his own arrhythmic heartbeat.

A squeaking mouse slides across the kitchen's waxen floor,
cockroaches do the rumba,
☞ a skunk hides in the storage closet, devouring all the *Brillo* pads.
Sebastian presses his salivating mouth against the plate-glass windows,
his hands signaling to the waltzing janitor, but he doesn't notice him,
the jukebox blasting "The Blue Danube"
while Sebastian wishes he were in his warm bed ☞ dreaming of pancakes,

then he collapses, unconscious, in an illuminated parking spot,
☞ is kept company by bats' dead-on impressions of whirling dervishes
as two clock-hands meet
in the welcome embrace of 3:17 in the morning.

SAMANTHA & *the* BUTTERFLIES

Sebastian stares at the crinkled sheets where his girlfriend's hidden herself.

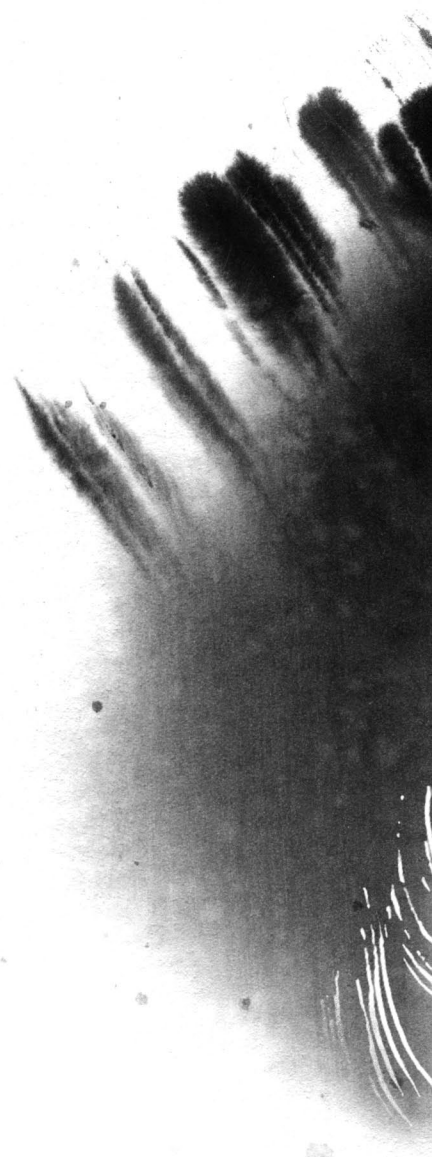
She's barely awake beneath them,
replying weakly to his repeated entreaties of goodbye.
He buttons his buttons & pokes his arms through his suit jacket's sleeves,
& his heart pounds
wondering whether to awake her for a quick kiss.

A secret world lies where Samantha's body's curled in its quiet cocoon,
the silence of her sanctuary so imposing.

He inches closer, uncovering her head,
& her throat emits a catlike nonsensical noise.
I love you, Sebastian hears himself say as his lips touch hers,
but they're motionless,
expressing nothing as she quickly turns her body away from his.

Somewhere in Samantha's room, love lingers.
It hovers above them & is distant like a sun divorced from its light,
& as she covers her head again,
Sebastian inches his way towards the bedroom's open door.
There are still no children to disturb & no covenants to rupture,
& his gold rings remain in the box he purchased two weeks earlier;
their inscriptions
whispering romantic dreams in the darkness.

Love flutters in an imperceptible flapping outside of earshot,
its gossamer wings
endeavoring to exit their cramped quarters,
& Sebastian waits momentarily on the outside,
hoping for the courage to return & pronounce his feelings,
but he waits, wavering,
then goes through the front door, which swallows him whole,
as a breeze brushes off all the butterflies around him.





SWALLOWING ANOTHER TONGUE

Sebastian writes in a foreign language. making up, the words, as, he, goes.
nor paying. attention to grammatical.
He smiles sighs ponders eats, heads, back to sleep.
words circling around him in vengeful formation,
consonants
sticking into his unprotected skin. vowels
obstacling his bowels.
strings of alliterative words wrapping around his nice neat new neck
in an unpleasantly pleasant noose.
trails of syllables stalking him through the night.

language is unforgiving. Sebastian seeks refuge in its crawlspace,
in his primary language's storage room,
in the brain's sprawling depository for all things thought or said.
& its confines' coziness brings him temporary relief,
but there's a scraping at the door,
a rattling of chains beyond his sight's perimeters.
The lock that kept him safe begins buckling. wood splintering. Then

he's face-to-face with a million foreign words & constructions
all muttering something incomprehensible.
Sebastian backs into the protective spine of an Oxford Dictionary,
Its unabridged knowledge fending off words he doesn't yet know.
& the other language
stretches out its collective hands, offering its suspicious truce,
surrounding him with its cacophony of tongues.
as they whisper *One of us... One of us...*
& enter rank-&-file through his open mouth,
their endless words covering each loose flap of skin
until he's nothing more
than a conglomeration of their syllables.

BEING TRUE TO HIMSELF

“*Yo soy un hombre sincero*,” Sebastian says in the station
as he slips a dollar bill into the guitarist’s half-open guitar case,
 & the musician, still tuning his instrument,
is mildly surprised to see him showing such premature musical appreciation.
 “*Un momento*,” he pleads,
as his fingers twist the knobs at the end of the instrument’s neck.

Just the day before, Sebastian had leaned over Samantha,
Her body sheltered beneath the sheets’ crumpled embrace
 as he told her
how he hoped to spend the rest of his life with her,
even if it meant occasionally having to clean up the house,
 & she’d responded with a few grunts,
turning her body away from him before pulling the sheets over her head.

With so many plans germinating inside him,
Sebastian feels he’d need a thousand more lives to fulfill them,
 & he stands & watches
as the guitarist prepares his instrument,
staring intently at the still strings as other commuters pass by,
 none of them paying attention
to where a genesis of notes will be released.

Sebastian waits, remembering the words he’d said
as he handed his humble show of gratitude to the guitarist.
 & he thinks:
How can I hold so much love inside of me?
as the train approaches with a rush of wind & a swirl of papers,
 & he enters the train
& sits down facing the guitarist, who’s just begun singing Guantanamera,
 the musician smiling broadly at him from the platform,
& Sebastian believing he’s ready for the remainder of his charmed life.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH KO UN

Sebastian's walking down Broadway when Ko Un
– the famous Korean poet –
stops him & asks for his name.
Sebastian, Sebastian says, extending his hand
& explaining he's also a poet.

But I am not a poet, Ko Un tells him. *I am a butterfly*,
& Sebastian stares blankly at him before Ko Un finally adds:
Do I look like a butterfly?

Thinking it a trick question, Sebastian's slow to answer.
Not really, Sebastian replies,
& Ko Un smiles & says: *Then I must be a poet after all*,
& he takes out his notebook & pens a short poem about Sebastian
before continuing down Broadway.

As Sebastian watches him,
huge wings unfurl from Ko Un's back
& he soars into the air
until the small speck of him vanishes into the blue sky.

Well, Sebastian says, *I guess I was wrong*.

SEBASTIAN'S BURRITO & *the* CONCEPT *of* INFINITY

Sebastian speaks to his refried-pork burrito at the Mexican restaurant,
asking it for advice
as he removes its successive layers of flour tortilla.
People will think you're crazy, the burrito tells him,
its rice-covered folds moving in syncopation with the words,
yet the other diners pay no attention to their imaginary conversation.

So in other words, Sebastian says,
the concept of an infinite universe is, by nature, either illogical
or beyond the scope of our comprehension,
but the burrito gives no reply as a loud crash comes from the kitchen,
& three giraffes stick their heads out through the flapping kitchen doors.

If the universe is a circle, Sebastian adds, *then what's outside the circle?*
What's all that space beyond the circle?
The burrito shrugs its shredded cheese,
then an old-fashioned tungsten light-bulb appears
over its mix of guacamole, sour cream, refried beans, & pico de gallo.
I've got it! the burrito exclaims. *The solution to the universe's paradox!*
It's so easy! The space beyond the circle's...

but before it finishes its sentence,
the burrito's light-bulb is gobbled up by one of the three giraffes,
& it can't remember the rest.
I think it had something to do with infinity, the burrito mutters,
but then the second giraffe devours it,
leaving Sebastian all alone to ponder his thoughts about the universe.

INTO *the* BLACK HOLE

Where Samantha had been lying, a hole opens up in the bed.

It's small at first,
like thoughts unsaid or words afraid to be spoken,
& from these undone sentences comes the casualty of their caresses,
Samantha's hands fading
as slanted moonlight mixes with dust motes floating in her bedroom.

Dark & infinite, it swallows the bedspread, blanket, & sheets,
& seeps into the stale air around where Sebastian's eyes open,
& beside him
he feels this new emptiness,
this wish for warmth converted into a stolen space,
knowing how Samantha was here,
how maybe it was a single syllable said wrong,
how a vowel can ease into a vowel & confuse the meaning
in a clutter of surrounding consonants,
how her desire for time apart became a start towards separation.

He sees every image of himself captured in her eyes,
reflecting the shadows
of figures devoid of shape,
darkness devouring his imagined days still held within her,
a hole hovering all around him
& cornering him in the diminutive haunts of her negative space,
threatening to drag him into its darkness.

CAROLE/ANNE'S CRIES *for* INDEPENDENCE

Carole/Anne are swimming close to shore,
seeking out a shark to sever their stiling similitude.

Great white! Great white!,
they sing out to the magic of the murky waters,
unseen depths shrouded in mystery beneath a mirror of the obfuscated sky,
the sea taking them in
as their skin slips beneath the surface,
flesh falling through the successive layers of marine invisibility.

Their arms flap in feverish synchronicity,
sending them further from shore,
where Sebastian watches their unified feminine form:
Two arms, three legs, & two unnecessary appendices,
waves gathering
& rising above twin heads perched on a single neck,
their vertebrae fused into a single uncompromised column
& emptying
into the mermaid-like appendages of two partial tailbones.

Carole/Anne search for sea serpents escaping from an ancient past,
their scaly undulations
set out to separate the two girls governed by a single shared will.
but Sebastian loses sight of them,
his remembrance of evaporating water translating into a seaborne paralysis,
He cries out *Carole/Anne!* while crossing his salt-tinged fingers,
but the only reply
is a sea breeze billowing through his wind-whipped hair.

Waves roll onto the shore,
sending Sebastian their frothed tongues' incomprehensible answers,
wave after wave
erasing the impermanent placement of a billion grains of sand,
& he hears Carole/Anne's chorus calling out
Great White! Great White!
before settling their bodies beneath the ocean's implacable silence.

AN APPARENT LACK *of* COLOR

Sebastian sees colors where there are none,
 which presents a problem
when painting canvases without utilizing paint,
 his art-dealer gasping
when viewing his commissioned work in an apparent state of inchoation.

A blank slate stares out at everyone but Sebastian,
who's utterly unaware of others' inability to see what he plainly sees.
When people speak of his paucity of hues, shades, & forms,
 he hears only praise,
imagining their gesticulations to be touting his genius,
the colors in his mind as broad as the brush strokes in the sky.

Curved, circuitous, & angled lines leap between his neurons,
 receptors overjoyed in their electric reflexes,
because he knows his art's an empty canvas,
his innovation being to go from concept to finished form
 without a single movement out of mind.

One day, he'll be famous for this,
people mentioning his name & imagining what he could've made,
 if things had been incorporated in a specific space,
yet for the present, the public wants no part of this:
They clamor for clear displays of color, a blending of blues & oranges,
 a world of artifice
awaiting the canvas perched in front of him,

but Sebastian's enamored
with the possibilities inherent in the absence of everything,
 so he delves deeper into nothing,
throwing his canvases into the sea
& washing away the colors from his mind,
so that they may return more vibrant than ever.

LOSS AVERSION

It's been five weeks, two days, twelve hours, six minutes & fifty seconds
since Samantha last spoke with him,
having told him it'd be best if they no longer called each other,

but while he sleeps,
the empty space beside him seems to say it's best for her,
yet not best for him.

Best for her, he mutters,
picking up the rope again & running his fingers down its coarse geography.

He's experienced loss before,
periods of prolonged depression derived from bad break-ups,
yet somehow this is different,
this loss irreplaceable & full of the flora of infatuation,
a book of fantasies forged around a Samantha who never existed,
having reinvented her
in the dense fog of his boundless imagination.

Now all this fictionalized felicity has been disrupted for the best.
Sebastian knows this & examines the tag at his rope's end:
it says \$12,
\$12 for something which – in a matter of weeks or months,
once his period of grief's reached its own natural termination –
will be entirely & wonderfully useless,

& he mutters *Loss aversion*,
wondering why he wasted \$12 on this thing in the first place,
& places the rope back on the table

& sighs.

SEBASTIAN'S SHOES

Sebastian takes off his shoes,
placing them in front of the mirror as his eyes stare back at him.

He pauses,
hearing the sound of the trickling water from his leaking toilet,
then peers at the tiny goldfish swimming precise circles around the bowl.

He steps back into his cluttered bedroom to search for some glue.

Fido, his plastic German Shepherd,
mentally follows along from his resting spot in the corner.
Where did I leave my brother? Sebastian mutters to himself
as he digs through a heap of discarded underwear.

The doorbell rings & Sebastian hears fading steps of a person in flight.

Here it is! he exclaims,
grabbing a fluorescent light bulb & unscrewing it from his night lamp.
He carries the bulb to the bathroom & drops it into the toilet bowl.
From far-off he hears a baby's wail.

He stands there for a second, not knowing what to do.

The glue! he shouts as he heads back to the heap of underwear.

At the bottom of the cotton construction,
he finds his baby brother fast asleep, thumb in mouth,
& Sebastian reaches into his brother's diapers to pull out the bottle of glue.

Upon returning to the bathroom, he unscrews the cap with his teeth
& squeezes a copious heap of adhesive on each of his shoe's black heels,
then quickly affixes them to the mirror.

There, he sighs, but he realizes the shoes are too high,
no longer covering the two black holes of his eyes like they should've.

If only someone would lend me his shoes, he whispers,
lamenting his loneliness,
but just at that moment, the doorbell rings again
& once again he hears the fading steps of a person in flight,
someone who's almost certainly left him a new pair of shoes

or who's perhaps returned to take them away.

THE RACING *of the* PIGS

Sebastian's careful to be friendly to the concierge,
since he's had bad experiences
with strangers stealing his shoes in the middle of the night.
A paper airplane zooms overhead & a small child apologizes,
explaining he's stolen Sebastian's passport
& ripped out the beautifully-stamped pages
to build model airplanes based on pre-WWI designs.

It's close to midnight,
& Sebastian asks the concierge to wake him up early so he can see
"The Racing of the Pigs",
which will take place through the town's cobblestone streets.
The concierge winks at him & whispers *Bright & early, baby*,
but Sebastian thinks little of it at the time,
his appendix tired after having traveled over 278 kilometers today.

Meanwhile, Sebastian threatens that if he's not given back his passport,
he'll dunk the young boy in a vat of pig lard,
& he's promptly given his ripped-up passport back,
as well as the 14 assorted war-planes it's been made into.
It's now past midnight, & Sebastian slips into his hotel room,
where he places his shoes under lock & key.

He can hardly sleep thinking about the excitement the pigs will bring,
then a loud knock on the door announces the arrival of the concierge,
who's dressed in nothing but a thong.
I've waited my entire life for this moment, the concierge says,
but Sebastian – inconsolably depressed – is of little use to him,
painfully unaware of these local traditions.





THE CONTINUITY *of* TIME

Sebastian lies alone in his bed, no longer with Samantha,
his fingers tapping out a rhythm on the sheets
so that the cockroaches beneath him will know when to dance,
& the neighbor's plastic cat still stares towards his window,
from where his plastic dog stares back.

Carole/Anne have returned from their job in telemarketing customer-service
& quietly eat a chocolate bar in the room next door.
They've given up on their quest for separation,
no longer seeking out the sea's sharp-toothed sharks to divide them,
& their baby brother
sleeps underneath his pile of underwear.

A short walk from the apartment,
"Pancake Palace" is closing its doors, its floors flooded with thick batter,
its janitor pirouetting with a disheveled mop,
while in the county jail,
Sebastian's fathers dig a tunnel through which they'll escape
to a neighboring mental institution,
but no one will notice their transfer,
as dead stars revolve around themselves in the dark night sky,
whispering their gravities & radioactivity
& mocking the ephemeral love of terrestrial beings.

Sebastian stares up into that sky, imagining himself in the silent space,
in the hush of a devouring light devoid of body.
His fingers keep tapping,
the roaches keep dancing,
his sisters keep eating,
& the plastic pets keep staring at each other
as dead stars illuminate them all,
everything going on as it had before, despite Samantha's absence,
or perhaps because of it.

FUNNY MONKEY

Sebastian awakes with a heavy, rattling chain wrapped around his neck,
its cold metal slowly slicing into his skin.

He's on a tree limb stripped of its bark,
& a crowd of curious on-lookers, carrying backpacks & mixed drinks,
are throwing assorted nuts & berries towards his elevated vantage point.

They're screaming *Funny monkey! Look at the funny monkey!*,
though Sebastian's not a monkey,
& he's not that funny.

Someone or something's attached a long, furry tail to his denim jeans
& the tourists take turns pulling it,
interfering with Sebastian's efforts to stabilize his precarious equilibrium.

His tongue's tangled & swollen,
incomprehensible sounds sliding out of his ineffective throat & lungs,
lacerating the links of language
as the gawking masses toss their refreshments at him & chime in:
Sing us a song, funny monkey!

Sebastian starts wondering about the definitions of his given identity.
Could he be a monkey?
Besides being chained to a tree limb,
he knows of no characteristics he shares with his simian cousins,
yet he's fond of bananas.

He stares down at these people robbing him of his humanity,
& examining the crowd dressed from head to toe in tourist garbs,
he realizes they're not people at all.
He grabs a piece of paper from his pocket
& holds it out to them after furiously scribbling in big black letters:
YOU ARE THE MONKEYS!

A large collective gasp rises to where Sebastian sits chained in his tree,
& the crowd quickly disperses,
though a few days pass before someone approaches Sebastian
& decides – grudgingly – to set him free.

DATE WITH DEATH

Sebastian unexpectedly comes face to face with his own death,
but he has trouble recognizing her,
since she's not wearing any masks or high-concept pretensions:
She's just death staring unabashedly at him,
as he steps gracefully from side to side
& dances *merengue* with this new & relatively-attractive partner.

His friends whisper warnings into his ear, but he pays them no attention:
He's never had so much fun before,
never having been so close to death.
He invites her out for dinner & a movie
& she appears right on time,
ordering fried chicken with extra cheese for them both.

Over the course of their relationship,
she attempts to sell him an assortment of cutlery
& several prescription drugs he swears he doesn't need,
but Sebastian feels something's just not right,
how she's always getting ahead of herself,
imposing elaborate short-term plans upon Sebastian's very-near future,
a future he's deliberately kept hidden from himself.

As death runs her chill fingers down his trembling spine,
Sebastian whispers *I need more time*.
& death replies *It's now or later*,
& several weeks later, they sleep together for the first time,
both of them lying upon a cold cement slab beneath a moonless sky.

Death feels she's gotten beneath Sebastian's skin,
circulating through his clogging veins & the fracturing of his fragile bones.
There's no escape, she whispers,
but it's too late,
Sebastian having grown out of love with death's embrace.
He prefers watching movies by himself & chewing his health-food in silence.

When he tells death the news, she disappears in a cloud of smoke,
& Sebastian sighs,
swearing to himself it's time he found someone a little more lively.

EXIT FROM INTERNMENT

Stepping into the empty gas chamber,
Sebastian breathes in the stale air as his hands slide over the tiled walls,
 while from outside
he hears a swirling sparrow's song in flight.
No one else is around, this space abandoned for decades.
He breathes in the stale air & breathes out the stale air.
 There's nothing here for him.

He steps out & walks into a terraced building next door,
walls composed of thick slippery stones overgrown with moss.
 From the thin gaps between them,
metal spikes stick out, attached to cobwebbed chains,
& flakes of dried skin are piled on the floor beneath them.
 Sebastian shudders
as he circles his fingers around the cold links
emitting a deadened clink before falling silent,
 like water leaking down stone,
but there's nothing here for him,

& he exits this cellar,
heading to the concrete blocks next door.
 He steps into a small room,
its barred entrance open,
but with no signs of present occupants.
There's just a tattered hood on the cracked cement floor
 & shredded pages
from an eviscerated holy book,
while in a dust-plagued corner, a rusted razor's coated
 with a splash of dried blood,
but so much time's passed, & there's nothing here for Sebastian,

so he leaves the cells,
entering the apartment building next door & opening the entrance
 with jangling keys he extracts from his pocket.
He climbs the stairs, walks through his apartment's open door,
& is greeted by the chocolate-smeared faces of Carole/Anne
 & the wise stoicism of Fido,
& even the two halves of giraffe fetus his 3rd & 4th fathers gave him,
& he can't help but think how incredibly-lucky he is to be alive,
 even if it *is* a strange life.

GETTING ENGAGED *to* HIMSELF

Tired of the loneliness of bachelorhood, Sebastian decides to marry.
As he stares into the mirror,
he reminds himself he's a handsome man with much to offer,
while outside his apartment, a million women dream of a man like him,
but all these women are living in Sri Lanka,
& Sebastian will never travel to Sri Lanka,
nor will he quiet the nagging suspicion a million women dream of him
in some far-off corner of the world.

Then, as he looks at the ever-widening wrinkles on his face,
he's reminded of all his imperfections,
how each second slips away like drops of water from his hands,
& challenging his persistent solitude, Sebastian decides to marry himself.
He'll be the perfect bride,
since he'll know what to expect from himself for the rest of his days,
knowing what he likes & what he doesn't,
& sometimes, he's even able to read his own mind.

He knows there are basic problems with his apparent union
despite his optimistic pretensions,
& in time, he'll grow bored of all the details of his daily living,
the spontaneity coming to an end, his immense joys of discovery
gradually giving way to routine,
& though he should be happy with this intimate connection to himself,
he feels his life's too brief to dedicate himself to a single person,
& the bond will be broken,
as someone, somewhere, will eventually steal him away from himself.

THE JOURNEY BACK

Deciding to travel back in time,
Sebastian consumes vast quantities of butter cookies,
 but it doesn't work,
so he varies the measurements of the batter's ingredients,
 & still the butter cookies are ineffective vehicles for time travel.

He gathers up all the baseball cards from his childhood,
 dog-eared & folded,
& strips naked & tapes them upon himself,
covering everything except his eyes & the small of his back,
 which he can't reach.

He closes his eyes & reopens them,
seeing his new girlfriend staring at a Barry Bonds "Topps" rookie card
 strategically placed at his groin,
while Fido is covered in baseball cards from the years 1985 to 1988.
Did you pick up the artichokes at the supermarket? Angelique asks,
 but Sebastian shakes his head
& recounts his attempts at voyaging back through time.

But our present existence would become an unsustainable paradox,
 she warns him,
then slyly removes the disgraced slugger's card,
& soon a pile of tattered baseball cards & butter cookies surround them,
 witnesses to their boundless ambition.

Sebastian's not sure why he wanted to travel back in time,
but as he's leaving the apartment in search of the artichokes,
 he looks over by the window
& notices where his frozen sentinel had always been,
 there's now no trace of him,
not a single plastic sign on the hardwood floor,
except for four small footprints, a Milwaukee Brewers team card,
 & a half-eaten butter cookie.

SEBASTIAN MEETS SANTA CLAUS

Sebastian decides to dress up as Santa Claus every day except Christmas,
 & today's Christmas,
so Sebastian's wearing jeans & a t-shirt
& is hoping his resolution to dress up as Santa Claus doesn't last long.
He's also hoping his resolution to run naked through the streets
 won't make it to the streets.

Sebastian's always had a fascination with discovering he's Santa Claus,
 maybe because he's fond of snow
& of the concept of an endless supply of toys,
as if one could possess an infinite universe & all of its marvels
 inside something like a sack,
& though he knows merely dressing up like Santa Claus
won't mean an automatic change of residence to the North Pole,
 he's curious about the Northern Lights,
even if he & Angelique probably wouldn't last long in the cold.

As he's contemplating the pros & cons of being a supernatural gift-giver,
 there's a knock on the door
& a man claiming to be St. Nick is carrying Fido,
who's attired in French Revolutionary garments & tattered baseball cards.
 Stick to what you know,
Santa tells him as he hands Sebastian his somewhat-stationary pet,
& he says nothing else, walking down the stairs, out the door,
 & into an SUV parked out in front,
which peels away as the tires screech on the melting ice.
Sebastian watches as Santa disappears into the urban sprawl.

He realizes too late he could've jumped him & taken his Santa Claus suit,
 but it just wasn't meant to be.
At least now he's got Fido back,
who has a handwritten note in French stuck to his plastic coat
 & which roughly translates to
Tell me more about this Mike Schmidt fellow!,
but Sebastian can do nothing but ruminate on the myriad mysteries of life
 & of the universe he was born into.

CELEBRATING DECEMBER 26

The day after Christmas,
Sebastian readies himself for his favorite holiday of all: Christmas.
It's December 26th,
& stray Christmas trees have begun to be abandoned on city sidewalks
alongside the rusted interiors of refrigerators & a slew of splintered chairs,
but the chairs are of no use to him:
Sebastian picks the best pine tree & drags it three blocks to his apartment.

Carole/Anne wait for him with their Siamese smiling faces,
both of them eager to spread joy & cheer & a little bit of ribbon-tape.
They've painted the walls red & green
& laid down a layer of cotton tufts to look like snow upon the carpet.
This is going to be the best Christmas ever!, Carole/Anne shout in unison,
their hands pressing up against their single chest.

Sebastian & Angelique set up ten metal chairs,
in case one of his fathers escapes from the local hospital's psychiatric ward,
& the orphan's outside with his stones,
throwing them against Fido's window to catch Carole/Anne's attention,
while Sebastian's baby brother crawls in from the bathroom,
a white beard pasted on his forehead,
& in the temporary sanctuary of its toilet bowl,
his goldfish dreams of sugar-plum fairies & of an aquarium free of porcelain,

Meanwhile, Fido's still looking out the window,
locked in his staring match with Cuddles the plastic cat across the street.
There's a wreath on Fido's head
& tiny electric lights are intricately weaved all around his body,
& even the roaches beneath Sebastian's bed celebrate the season's tidings,
trading in their ritual square-dance
for a miniscule version of "The Christmas Pageant",
a detailed Nativity scene where they play the lead roles
of the three wise men, the camels, & the ass.

When the doorbell rings,
it's only the brown-bagged greetings of Li Po,
as he delivers their meal from "Great Wall of China" down the block,
& they invite him in for Christmas dinner as well,
thus putting the finishing touches on this almost-perfect holiday.

RESEARCH ON CABBAGE

Sebastian decides he'll write the best poem ever written,
settling down at his desk
& staring optimistically into his computer's blank screen.

More likely than not, the best poem ever to be written
will either be about love
or about the heartache of a love not meant to be,

but believing this to be too easy,
Sebastian decides that the best poem ever written
will be about cabbage,

& having chosen his subject matter,
he spends the next several weeks researching cabbage,
being careful to limit himself

so the poem's content won't drift towards barely-related subjects,
such as sauerkraut or coleslaw,
mutations on form subverting the poem's proposed purity.

A poem about cabbage must be about cabbage & nothing else,
& Sebastian intends to pen the definitive poem about cabbage,
but that's just the beginning:

Each curving leaf will remind readers of their own ephemeral existence,
this transcendent vegetable,
cultivated in various climates & seasons

becoming a stark metaphor for love, labor, & loss,
& a source of universal pride for writers & readers alike,
but upon completing his research,

Sebastian has a nervous breakdown & decides to never write again,
his poem about cabbage left unwritten,
the greatest verses having to await someone else's eager hand.

ANOBIUM

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Coleoptera

Infraorder: Bostrichiformia

Superfamily: Bostrichoidea

Family: Anobiidae

Subfamily: Anobiinae

Genus: Anobium



Anobium is the Chicago-grown brainchild of Benjamin van Loon and Mary J. Levine. Anobium is an independent publisher specializing in the assemblage of strange, surreal and insectile English-language literature.

For questions, compliments, and complaints, please contact us at:

EDITOR@ANOBIUMLIT.COM

/

ANOBIUM

c/o Benjamin Van Loon
2557 W Eastwood Ave, #2
Chicago, IL 60625

Learn more online at:

ANOBIUMLIT.COM

FACEBOOK.COM/ANOBIUM

TWITTER.COM/ANOBIUMLIT

Book cover/interior Illustrations & Design by Jacob van Loon

JACOBVANLOON.COM



Anobium is a member of the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Greenhouse is a Pushcart Prize nominee and his work has appeared in many national and international journals, including *The Bitter Oleander*, *Cream City Review*, *Interim*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *Roanoke Review*, *Slipstream* and others. He works as a Spanish interpreter in the New Jersey courts and lives in Jersey City with his wonderful wife. This is his first chapbook.